FOR MISSION LEADERS

MISSION-FOCUS

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The Gospel and Mission Strategy

By Howard H. Charles

Gospel and mission strategy belong together. One speaks of message; the other is concerned with communication. Both are needed. The gospel is good news that exists to be shared. But the order of the terms in the title is significant. Gospel stands first not only because there must be something to share before ways of sharing can be discussed. There is a more fundamental reason. Mission strategy must be rooted in and have integrity with the gospel. If it is not, then the gospel itself may be distorted or even falsified in the process of sharing.

Gospel Defined

Gospel then is the prior term. But what is the gospel? It may seem a bit late in the day to be asking this question. Don't we all know what the gospel is? Perhaps, until we try to define it. Then it suddenly becomes elusive. The more we think about it, the more complex it becomes. If we seek help from others, more than likely we will receive diverse answers.

Some would define it as essentially a body of beliefs. The gospel becomes an intellectual abstraction. Even the earthly Jesus or the glorified Christ is reduced to the status of an idea in an intellectual system. Orthodoxy is of prime concern. When the gospel is understood in this way, mission strategy is devoted to the transmission of information. Indoctrination with a view to correct conceptualization is a logical correlative of a propositional view of the gospel.

Others would see the gospel primarily in experiential terms. The emphasis gravitates toward what has happened in personal religious experience, on life in Christ or in the Spirit, on feeling, etc. Jesus is viewed as the spiritual Christ who is the secret of the desired inward experience. Frequently the experience is stereotyped with Paul, Luther, Wesley or Pentecostalism furnishing the model. Mission strategy then turns to the matter of reproducing the stereotype.

Still others would find the gospel consisting chiefly in a style of life. Jesus is regarded as a teacher and exemplar of a pattern of conduct. The locus

of the gospel is no longer in a theological system or in spiritual experience but in ethics. The gospel, broadly speaking, is equated with the Sermon on the Mount and the ethical injunctions in the N.T. letters. Mission strategy in this case is devoted to securing the proper action response. Conduct must conform to the code.

While there is a modicum of truth in each of these ways of viewing the gospel, there are also serious limitations which are then reflected in mission strategy. The gospel is more than a set of ideas for the mind, or a catalytic agent for galvanizing emotions or a code addressed to the will. Its referent lies elsewhere.

The Bible points us to the arena of history. To be sure, the gospel does not emerge out of history as though it were its product, but neither can it be understood apart from history. It has an "event" character. It can best be told in story form.

Christ-Event Is Central

The story begins with Abraham (Gal. 3:8) but in the thick of the plot stands the figure of Jesus. He was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. Yet the heavens were open to Him and He was full of the Spirit of God. The path He chose was that of the lowly servant of the Lord serving faithfully in a ministry of word and deed. Then came the cross and darkness, followed by the triumph of life over death. The New Testament as a whole makes it abundantly clear that Jesus not only proclaimed the gospel (Mk. 1:14f.) but that in the totality of His ministry, He was Himself the gospel (Rom. 1:3f.; cf. Acts 10:36ff.).

When the gospel is seen as focusing in the advent and ministry of Jesus, none of our first definitions is adequate. Not only is each too fragmentary, but it misses what is most distinctive: Jesus in the wholeness of His ministry. In this larger whole are held together both word and deed, the Sermon on the Mount and the cross and all that lies between. What is more, the gospel is seen in relation both to what preceded and to what follows the ministry of Jesus. That ministry marked a decisive stage in God's pursuit of His purpose in the world. That purpose is the gathering of a people for Himself. God wishes to establish community between Himself and man and between men. That goal is magnificently portrayed in the closing vision of the N.T. (Rev. 21:1-22:5). The Christ-event is a fresh beginning in an effort to reach the goal, an effort repeatedly frustrated by man's recalcitrance. Jesus is the second "Adam" (I Cor. 15:45ff.; Rom. 5:12-21). He is the nucleus of a new community upon whom His Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. The story of the spread and growth of that new community is told in the pages of Acts and in the annals of later church history.

The People of God: The New Creation

To put the understanding of the gospel in the context of the dynamic outworking of God's purpose to create a people for Himself is to place its meaning in a new framework. The elements of belief, experience and action noted at the outset of this discussion are not discarded but they are re-polarized. They are caught up in a larger living unity and are given new significance. The gospel, for example, has to do with understandings and

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beliefs. It is not a foe of theology. But its theology can no longer be that of a cold and sterile scholasticism. It is rooted in a story of what has happened in history and is an attempt to expound its meaning. It is more like a living organism than a dissected corpse. It is more of a commentary on a narrative than an exercise in logic. It is a creed to be sung, not merely signed.

Again, the element of experience is not ignored or minimized. But when it is seen in the framework of the gospel story certain safeguards are provided against its distortion. This might be illustrated in various ways, but space will allow only one reference. The gift of the Spirit is part of God's beneficence toward us in the gospel. As Christians we are to be full of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). But the category of "Spirit" in and of itself is a rather nebulous one. It is like a wax nose that can be turned in any direction desired. It is like the wind without form or shape and unpredictable. All sorts of inexplicable and bizarre experiences can be attributed to the Spirit, if the Spirit is largely severed from rootage in the gospel story, that is. When the Spirit is seen as tied firmly to the figure of Jesus, then definite structure is given to our understanding of the Spirit and His work in our lives. Experience is prevented from being swallowed up in the morass of subjectivism.

Ethics, likewise, do not lose their importance but are seen in a new light when they are rooted in the gospel story. Abstracted from that context the ethical injunctions of the New Testament may be reduced to a "do it yourself" morality. The door stands open to move on the one hand in the direction of a legalistic moralism or on the other toward a flabby "situation ethic." But Christian ethics in the New Testament sense are not like flowers that can be cut and arranged at will. They are potted plants with sustaining roots. They are response ethics to what God has done in the Christ-event. They take their shape and derive their motivation from the particulars of that action. They flow from grace and are meant to be energized by the gift of the Spirit. They are designed to make evident in the midst of the old age what are the contours of the new. Seen in this light, ethics are not the whole gospel, nor an adjunct to it. They are an integral part of it.

Thus far we have been trying to establish a point of reference for understanding the gospel, a way of viewing it. To focus, as we have, on the "event" character of the gospel is to keep it oriented toward the realities of history. It is to emphasize as of first importance what has happened (Christ-event) in order to put what is happening (experience) and what ought to happen (ethics) in proper perspective.

Our proposal is that we seek the gospel as God's free and gracious action in the Christ-event to create a people who in fellowship with Himself and one another will achieve their true destiny. This is to think in personal (not to be equated with individual) and relational categories which are appropriate to the dynamic complexities of the gospel. It is to assign a unique and decisive role to Jesus. It is to look not only upward and backward but also forward if we hope to understand the full dimensions of the good news.

Strategy of Mission

To see the gospel in its historicity has certain implications as might be expected for mission strategy. To these we must now turn. Only three

have been selected for brief comment. First, there is the matter of the mode of presenting the gospel. The Christian, although obviously interested in getting a favorable response to the gospel, cannot be a propagandist in the sense of manipulating people for his own ends. He must be concerned about three matters: He will offer content (the facts of the gospel and their meaning). He hopes to arouse interest in and get assent to the gospel. He must respect the freedom of the individual to make his own decision.

One of the most difficult problems in evangelism, at least on the American scene, is to arouse interest in the gospel. Declaratory assertions and dogmatic pronouncements are often met with indifference. They dampen rather than create curiosity. They appear to coerce decision rather than invite it. Perhaps we can learn something from the form in which the gospel was first wrought out in history that may be helpful in presenting it in our situation.

The historical figure of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels is not free of enigma. He attracted certain persons and repelled others. His presence, speech and conduct were not such that faith was inevitable. On occasion He might perform miracles, but when they were demanded of Him He refused. He spoke in parables. He challenged conventional ideas and practices. He fitted no stereotype. He invited investigation. In short, there was enough light and enough darkness that curiosity was stimulated and faith had a chance.

L. E. Keck in his recent book A Future for the Historical Jesus has suggested that today Jesus needs to be presented in the form of a question rather than a dogmatic answer. Men must be allowed to keep company with Him in such a way that He provokes again the ancient question "What sort of man is that?" (Matt. 8:27). To be sure, there is room for witness as to what faith has found in Jesus both from the pages of the New Testament and contemporary experience. But a declaratory mood which provides only answers and does not invite exploration does not do justice to the historical mode in which the gospel first came to us.

Second, to see the gospel in terms of the totality of Jesus' ministry means as we have already noted that it consists of both word and deed. It will not do to regard the miracles as merely seals attesting the truth of a gospel that finds it essence in a non-miraculous ministry. They too are a part of the gospel of the new order that was breaking into the old. Jesus was concerned about the abuse of the temple and took action to correct it. He warned against the dangers of wealth. He spoke out in defense of the poor and the helpless. He defied the conventions of the day that robbed men and women of the freedom and fullness of life intended for them.

This means that the familiar antithesis between evangelism as a soul-saving function and social involvement in the so-called non-spiritual aspects of human existence breaks down. To perpetuate this dichotomy is to misunderstand the meaning of the incarnation as the expressed form of the gospel. What particular shape our involvement with the physical, social, policital and economic needs of men will take cannot be spelled out in the abstract. It must be tailored to specific situations. It should be said, however, that the methods employed in these areas will need to be consistent with spirit and goals expressed in Jesus' ministry. The means must not invalidate the gospel that seeks expression through them.

Third, to take the historical character of the gospel seriously involves the necessity of its translation if it is to speak meaningfully to contemporary man. The warrant for this is found in the New Testament itself. Interesting changes can be discerned both in the way in which the gospel was conceptualized and in the forms of its cultural expresssion as it moved out from Palestine into the broader Roman world. To some extent this was inevitable because of the change in the linguistic medium. No translation from one language into another can be made without the risk of some loss or distortion of meaning.

Beyond the shift from Aramaic to Greek were some deliberate changes in ways of conceptualization. Jewish Christians, for example, made use of the category of "Messiah" to express the significance of Jesus. In the Greek world this was a meaningless term. Consequently, among Greek-speaking Christians the term, insofar as it was retained, was used not as a title but as a proper name. The title Lord was more meaningful and, therefore, preferred. One might speak also of the different ways in which the person of Christ and the meaning of His work are articulated in Colossians as compared with Hebrews. The former presents a historic-cosmic Christ as the Christian answer to a syncretistic theology. The latter offers an interpretation of Christ in the framework of the Jewish cult for a Jewish-Christian audience.

The Jerusalem conference represents an attempt to distinguish between the gospel and Jewish ethnocentric piety. It was decided that Greek Christians need no longer become Jews by the adoption of circumcision and all that it stood for before they could be good Christians. The gospel could now be expressed in certain appropriate Hellenistic cultural media.

The process of translation begun by the early church must be continued today. The crucial matter is to determine the criteria and to discuss the appropriate categories under which it can be carried forward. Then it shall still remain the gospel although expressed in new forms.

Howard H. Charles has been on the faculty of Goshen Biblical Seminary since 1947 teaching New Testament. He also is a member of the Personnel Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions. In 1961-62 he served in a special Bible teaching assignment with the Japan Mennonite Church.

Editorial Comment

The decision to launch Mission-Focus rests on several factors. The first is the belief that many members of the Mennonite Church constituency have a deeply-held commitment to the mission of the church, but clouds of confusion have been stirred by vigorous criticism of the church and her missionaries from various sides. There are admittedly grounds for criticism. We live in a "fishbowl" situation and history rises up in judgment of what has been done. Much of Christian witness and service will stand the test well but some of it will not. It is a sign of inner strength to be able to face up to what we are and the works we have done and let it all be judged honestly.

A second reason for Mission-Focus is the conviction that we are edging into an era of missionary opportunity which is so novel that we urgently need to begin exploration into its meaning. We now know very well the extent to which the missionary movement of the past has been activated and molded at crucial points by the economic, social and political realities of the day. This led to fatal compromises so that the church lost her prophetic vocation.

In the third place, we believe that there is a readiness on the part of many in our constituency to be challenged to a larger commitment to the missionary task and that this will happen as we return to the main sources of understanding. The Bible provides the norm against which we test all else. Out of the Bible come depths of insight and inspiration without which there is no missionary vision and response. We must also turn to church history and remind ourselves of the achievements and compromises of the past. (A recent example of this is John A. Lapp's very useful study, The Mennonite Church in India, which chronicles and analyzes the work of the Mennonite mission in India through the various stages until the present time when the church is completely independent and the mission apparatus rendered obsolete in that community.) In addition, we need to be thoroughly aware of our contemporary world--which is increasingly drawn more closely together by certain powerful forces while at the same time being fragmented by equally power counter-actions.

With these understandings in mind, the first issues of Mission-Focus will be examining biblical-theological perspectives which are basic to mission and the strategic response we are being called to make. This initial discussion by Howard Charles identifies very clearly the crucial role played by particular understandings of the gospel. Too often in the past there has been a divergence between concept and method with the result that method gained the upper hand. For example, there have historically been various views of the nature of the church. However, methods of evangelism and church planting have tended to be very similar. The result has been a certain underlying uniformity in result which the superficial external differences could not hide. This dominant role played by methodology needs to be seriously questioned and challenged. The Charles' essay serves to get the process started.

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THE DYNAMICS OF MISSION

By Wilbert R. Shenk

The mission of the people of God has its origin in the intention of God Himself. It can be placed in its proper perspective only if we understand this to be the very means by which God is achieving His purposes in history. A deformed understanding of mission allows it to be viewed as a special function for which special personnel and financial resources must be recruited. This understanding stems from a long process throughout church history by which the church accommodated to the purposes of the worldly order and was seen as the chaplain to society.

The Message of Jesus: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand"

The synoptic gospels characterize Jesus' ministry from the very outset as being messianic. They linked His ministry directly to the messianic expectation expressed in Isaiah 61. These, in turn, were based on the proclamation of Jubilee (Lev. 25: 10ff). "The acceptable year of the Lord" was understood to be that time when God's reign (or kingdom) would literally begin. It is noteworthy that when John the Baptist sent a delegation to Jesus to inquire whether in fact Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus quoted Isaiah's description of the Messiah's work and suggested that they "Go and tell John what you hear and see . . ." (Matt. 11:4-5).

Matthew, Mark and Luke each describe in essentially the same way the inauguration of Jesus' ministry: first the baptism, then the manifestation of the Spirit, the temptation experiences and finally He begins to preach. In baptism Jesus publicly indicated his identification with God's purposes in the world. The visible coming of the Spirit upon him was the confirming sign that He was indeed the Messiah for it was always understood that the Messiah would be the one in whom God's Spirit was fully sovereign.

It is not by accident that Jesus is thereupon faced with a decisive period of testing through the temptation experiences. The launching of the messianic reign through the word-deed of the "kingdom of God" immediately brought on a challenge from the kingdom of this world. In this brief sequence there is depicted the issue of the ages. There are two kingdoms which are utterly incompatible. There can be no accommodation, and ultimately victory will be won by one over the other.

The length of the encounter between Jesus and Satan and the exhaustion Jesus felt afterwards indicate the reality and gravity this held for Him. The plausibility of Satan's suggestions is universal. Not only did this place Jesus in a genuine dilemma but Satan's ploys are also live options for the people of God today. These strategies of Satan appeared to be consistent with the purposes of God, but they were in fact of a different order and were bound to lead to another outcome. Instead of realizing the reign of God through these strategies, Jesus would have been contributing toward solidifying the reign of Satan.

Not only did Jesus denounce Satan's suggestions directly to him, but He moved immediately from the temptation experiences into his public ministry. In defining what His ministry was all about, Jesus used Isaiah 61 as His text. What is of special significance is that in quoting from Isaiah's description of the work of the messiah Jesus leaves out a phrase crucial to his Nazareth audience ". . . and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:2b; cf. Isa. 35:4b). Thus the strategies suggested by Satan during the temptation experiences were not only rejected, they were, in fact, countered by a new strategy. The kingdom of God will be constituted without recourse to violence or force. To put it positively, what is characteristic of this kingdom is its utterly new basis. The Jubilee which had never been proclaimed by a king during Old Testament times had now been inaugurated by the Messiah himself and furthermore it was to be carried out in an utterly unconventional way--by a servant-messiah through suffering-love and self-sacrifice.

The Kingdom of God Is Eschatological

The way we view the present is profoundly shaped by the way we view the things to come. The Latin has two words for future: futurum and adventus. Futurum signifies the unfolding of that which was already inherent. The meaning of adventus, however, is the appearance of something new which was not present before. Our view of God's reign among men--His Kingdom--will be decisively affected by our vision of the present and the future.

Christian thought in the western world during the past 200 years has been strongly influenced by rationalism and an evolutionary view of human progress. Unprecedented economic and technological progress throughout these two centuries gave modern western man an unusual sense of self-confidence and optimism about human potential--notwithstanding the occurrence during these years of a series of the most costly wars in human history. This basically optimistic view of man had obvious effects on the way we have read our Bibles and have gone about theological reflection. There has been a strong tendency to see the future as futurum, as an unfolding of what is already present, a projection of our own desires and designs.

However, the biblical orientation is otherwise. The kingdom of God is the divine incursion into history, the "adventus." It is not a reformulation of what has been but represents "the new creation." The establishment of God's reign among men began with the Christ-event and will be brought to completion in the final coming of Christ. The resurrection itself was an eschatological event. In the resurrection we have already been given the final answer as to what the outcome will be (I Cor. 15:12-28). Therefore, in the Christ-event revelation became history and the present experience is now illumined by the hope we have in Christ Jesus. Our instructions as to how we carry out the establishment of God's kingdom, consequently, are to be drawn from this assured final victory.

The Kingdom of God is already present in judgment and redemption. The presence of the kingdom is a judgment on the existing world order and its rebellion against God, but it is a judgment which holds within it the possibility of repentance and, therefore, redemption. Those who accept God's reign are assured of continuity within His purposes because of the resurrection.

Although the kingdom of God is already present and we know the outcome, it is not yet completed, that is, God's reign is not yet fully established. The demonic forces are still at large and doing their work. Thus the work of establishing God's reign is a frontal attack on Satan's kingdom with the consequence that until the consummation there will be conflict and tension both for the individual and among men corporately.

The Kingdom of God Is Mediated by the Holy Spirit

The mission of God is the establishment of His reign among men and the Holy Spirit is the agent of that mission. The very presence and action of the Spirit is our "guarantee" (II Cor. 5:1-5) that it is God's work and final victory is assuredly His. The Spirit's work among the people of God is the down payment on the divine promise, the fulfillment of which we eagerly await.

Christ's presence in the world throughout this eschatological age is mediated to us by the Spirit. His role is to represent to men the person and work of Christ for it is through acceptance of Jesus Christ as the messiah that the reign of God is established in the lives of men. For those who have made that fundamental response in grace to the Spirit's bidding, the Spirit continues to work to bring about the "fulness of Christ" in anticipation of the final consummation. The Apostle Paul concludes his exposition on this point by saying that we ". . . are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:18b).

It is, finally, the Holy Spirit who inspires and equips the people of God for their role in the mission of God. This is accomplished by the giving of gifts to His people. The "fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:1-16; cf. I Cor. 12-14, Rom. 12:4-8) is to be experienced in this eschatological age by the utilization of the Spirit-given gifts bestowed on every member of the people of God. This endowment of gifts is universal. Every member shares in receiving a gift or gifts and is to be available to the entire body in putting the gift(s) to work. The endowment of gifts is based on differentiation. Each gift is unique as each individual is unique. Gifts are complementary because they are given for the benefit of the body and not for private welfare alone. When members of the body employ their gifts competitively or utilize them to exclude others, the "fulness of Christ" is obviously not being achieved and the effect is destructive of the body rather than building it up. The endowment of gifts is strategically ordered. The people of God have a purpose and the gifts facilitate the achievement of that purpose.

The Kingdom of God Is Actualized In God's People

The people of God are denoted as those who have accepted God's reign in their lives and exist as a part of this new community or the new humanity. They have confronted the fundamental dif-

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ference between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God and have made a choice. They are now living self-consciously as part of a new people even though they remain very much within the world.

What is significant about the people of God is not simply that they are a people for there are many peoples. Rather what distinguishes them is that they have been constituted into this peoplehood by God Himself. Allegiance to Him requires a completely new orientation which places His people in tension with their environment in the world. It is characteristic of human communities that the basis and boundaries of communal relations tend to be egocentric and ethnocentric. God is often reduced to nothing more than a tribal deity. The God revealed in Jesus Christ calls His followers to a self-emptying and His appeal is to all men. (In John's Revelation it has been disclosed that indeed God's will is to be achieved and His people will be comprised of persons from all languages and peoples. Rev. 5:9-10.)

Furthermore, this peoplehood is based on voluntary membership. God's grace alone is the basis for the existence of this new people and that grace does not contradict itself by coercing men into acceptance. Because the hallmark of this peoplehood is God's grace, the only instrument or power available is agape and the posture is that of servanthood (Phil. 2:5-8). The audacity of this power is that they can confront a hostile world with a strategy of diliberate powerlessness. It is this example and message which makes the gospel a "stone of stumbling, a rock of offense."

God's reign is being actualized through His people because they exist as a missionary people. This means that they are sent by God into the world to achieve His purposes. It is God's intention that His reign be extended ever more widely until it encompasses all who will follow Him and be joined to His people. The proclamation of God's kingdom is being done precisely by those who are already members and are themselves living examples of its meaning. To be a missionary people is to be set apart with a distinctive style of life and unique values. They have crossed the boundary from unfaith to faith in God.

The fundamental task of mission is to persuade others to cross over into a new way of living--to exchange a former way of life for a new one. In our recent growing awareness of cultural differences and the complexities involved in intercultural communication, there has been a temptation to dilute or blur this point. But there is an important distinction to be made. It is the duty of the missionary to make every effort to identify with the culture of the people to whom he goes. He must learn to understand their thought patterns and idioms so as to communicate the message as accurately and fully as possible. What he cannot do is to minimize the fundamental and drastic choice that is set before his listener. This point is made with great beauty and poignancy in the story of Ruth and Naomi where the latter warns concerning the risks and costs of "crossing over" and joining an alien people.

In Conclusion

The dynamics of mission originate in God Himself. Mission is the focal point of God's action in the world where His reign confronts the forces of the demonic and decisive struggle occurs.

The coming of Jesus Christ as messiah inaugurated God's reign. His resurrection guaranteed that during this eschatological age God's kingdom will be established and finally brought to consummation. The Holy Spirit, as the continuing presence of Christ in the world, is the agent for the accomplishment of God's reign among men. The people of God already share in the blessings of God's reign while also being the instrumentality through which this "gospel of the kingdom" continues to be preached wherever Jesus Christ is not yet lord.

Editorial Comment

For those familiar with the field of missionary literature it is a commonplace observation that the role of the Holy Spirit in mission has been largely neglected. A notable exception is the writings of that doughty prophet Roland Allen. He sensed that his concerns were largely ignored or misunderstood by his generation and predicted (correctly) that it would take another 40 years before he would be taken seriously. Starting in 1960 his works have been reprinted. It would also be unfortunate not to mention the significant work done by Harry R. Boer in Pentecost and Missions.

When one turns to the New Testament, particularly Acts, it is abundantly clear that in the experience of the early church the Holy Spirit was the central figure. All of the reasons for this significant discrepancy between New Testament experience and the modern missionary movement have yet to be identified.

There is a similar contrast when we examine the theme of eschatology in the New Testament and contemporary missionary thought and practice. The eschatological dimension is intimately related to the Holy Spirit. The vital presence of the Spirit always impressed on the people of God their true status in this world. When the fires of the Spirit die down, the church is apt to seek accommodation with the world in order to minimize the church-world tension.

It is also possible that the understanding we have of the nature of the church is at issue. It has been said that in the early years of the church the struggle revolved around order and ardor. Ultimately it was order that prevailed with the result that the church came to view herself as another one of the institutions of society. The church understood her role as a pillar of society, a protector of the status quo, rather than the prophet announcing God's word of judgment to men.

A possible additional reason for the loss of Holy Spirit-eschatological perspective is the way systems of biblical interpretation compartmentalize the scriptures. It becomes easier to see the many trees than the forest in its totality and grandeur.

Undoubtedly, some who read "The Dynamics of Mission" will be left feeling frustrated and asking for more specific application. We have assumed here that we have for too long neglected theological reflection on the significant issues confronting the missionary church and there will subsequently be opportunity to draw out some of the major conclusions which for now remain only implicit. Nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to simply note a few instances where it appears that the perspectives suggested here do apply.

In his historical survey and description of The Believers' Church, Donald F. Durnbaugh traces the development of "radical protestantism" from the 12th century to contemporary times. Although not conforming in all details to one model or pattern, these movements were usually marked by a renewed awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit, a heightened eschatological (sometimes apocalyptic) perspective and a new seriousness regarding the calling of the church (mission).

A quite different dimension is that of the societies into which the missionary movement of the past two centuries has gone. For example, the theme of messianic expectation can be traced out in many, many societies from ancient times to the present. Vittorio Lanternari in The Religions of the Oppressed studied the interplay between religion and revolution in societies around the world during the past 60 years and concludes that many oppressed peoples have tried to find solutions through religious experience and symbols. Likewise, the study of messianic movements among oppressed peoples in India, in Rebellious Prophets, by Stephen Fuchs suggests that these peoples cannot be understood or appreciated apart from the eschatological-spiritual perspective.

Unfortunately, western Christianity in general, and western theology in particular, has for too long marched to a different tune. It appears that the New Testament would have much to teach us if we are prepared to receive it.

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THE SHAPE OF MISSION STRATEGY

By David A. Shank

As a technical military term "strategy" speaks about the deployment of men and material in order to defeat and force capitulation of the enemy. In the context of the mission of the people of God, the term is highly loaded and its use fraught with danger. There is first of all a built-in notion of conquest, of triumphal imposition, of imperialism. But there also inhere the ideas of planning, structuring, and commissioning of "special forces" for the job of conquest. It seems that, "although God works in history through a comprehensive people-nation, and strictly speaking not through a missionary army, the latter must be organized for the avant-gard work of the total people."

This second danger is illustrated by Christian history, including our own times. That history is replete with the exploits of Christian crusaders and their conquests, proof abundant of an effective strategy. Whether the strategies employed were always those of the war of the Lamb, and whether the results were those sought by the Servant of the Lord who is to "bring forth justice to the nations," cannot be examined here. The subtle dangers inherent in the term, however, lead us to expect distortion, and amply justify a new look at the shape of strategy for Christian mission.

How does one avoid distortion? What precedents are valid for today? To what do we turn for criteria? What is the understanding that governs our discernment of a strategy?

The Cross as Strategy as Well as Message

The Abrahamic pilgrimage of faith was fulfilled in the Lordship of the life-giving Spirit released through the crucial ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. From His ministry emerged a new people from and in the midst of all nations. Through that strategy of persuasion through His suffering Servant God created a like-

minded people who are servant to all peoples for their blessing and salvation. The strategy of Christian mission is nothing more--nor less--than participating in carrying out God's own strategy. It's shape is that of a cross.

Paul's appeal to "Christ and Him crucified" for his message is essential to the missionary thrust. Even more basic as a clue to strategy is the apostle's appeal to the mindset of the Crucified. Any note of triumph, or conquest, or empire based on the essential and primitive confession of faith that Jesus is Lord must needs be seen in the light of that prior mindset which conditioned that Lordship and shaped its strategy.

The shape of strategy that you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God, but He did not think that by force He should try to become equal with God. Instead, of His own free will he gave it all up, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a man, he appeared in human likeness; he was humble and walked the path of obedience to death--his death on the cross. For this reason God raised him to the highest place above, . . . so that in honor of the name of Jesus all beings . . . will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The persuasive appeal continues to be addressed to the Church of Christ in the world today as the sine qua non of mission strategy. If, as Emil Brunner once wrote, "the church exists by mission as fire exists by burning," we can add--with two thousand years of history to substantiate the apostolic word--Christian mission is shaped by the cross as both strategy and message. The Lordship of the life-giving Spirit is the same as the incarnate servanthood of the self-denying, obediently humble, crucified-one. Our strategy should also be shaped by the same understanding. The Johannine great commission parallels the Pauline appeal: "As the Father sent me, so send I you." The appeal addresses the whole people of God, both in the Philippian letter and in the resurrection-word given to the disciples. The whole people of God is the special force to accomplish God's mission by the cross-strategy.

The Elements of a Cross-Strategy

1. Self-denial, the prerequisite.

The normal mindset behind the strategy of the individual, the social group, the institution, the religious body, the nation. . .is fundamentally: "What do I get out of this?" "How will this enhance my existence?" "How does this participate in my sense of fulfilment?" "How will this permit a more perfect self-realization?" "How shall I use privilege for my development?" But all of these questions are in contradiction to the cross mindset of Jesus, who "always had . . . but of his own free will he gave it all up."

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you . . . and he went out not knowing where he was to go . . . for

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he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose maker and builder is God." Abraham's faith was the self-denial of pilgrimage, and not the adventure of self-fulfilment. This is the place, says von Rad, where the Babel confusion of primeval history opens into the strategy of a new people. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself . . . ." The people of God learn to renounce privilege; "baptism into his death" is their point of departure.

The call to renounce and give up what constitutes a basic cultural identity (country, family, home) leads to the disturbing cross-cultural experience of discovering new identity. This new identity comes through faith in God who promises the creation of a universal family of those with a faith like that of Abraham. The test of that faith through the sacrifice of Isaac (the denial of his identity and continuity in the future descendants) is evidence of his reaffirmation of that mindset, his readiness for God's newness, and mission. The evidence of that readiness in God's people will always be their "No" to legitimate privilege. Without that strategic denial its mission will always be haunted by the specter of a smothering paternalism. "Look what I gave up for you" really means that nothing was given. "Why don't you appreciate what we are doing for you?" is always blurted from a standpoint of privilege. As is our "bringing them up to our level." The greater the <u>apparent</u> sacrifice (giving without giving up) the greater will be the paternalistic follow-through; the imperialism is to be found in the attitude.

The Kingdom will break in through the mission of God's people in the faith-discovery of new life in new forms, not a reproduction of the false absolutes of human privilege that have been renounced--economic systems, ideologies, political institutions, nationalism, racism, ethnic religions, etc. Abraham and the people of Jacob who are his descendants were completely opposite when the latter said to Samuel, "We will have a king over us, so that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles." The greatest of the church's missionaries in the Abraham-Jesus tradition expressed the cross-strategy when he wrote: "All those things that I might count as profit, I now reckon as loss for Christ's sake." This is the cross in life; the medium is the message.

The basic strategy is a "No" to privilege, without which all other strategies become expressions of a betrayal. It is not a once-for-all denial. As with Jesus, the tempter returns ever again seeking a more appropriate season.

2. <u>Servanthood, the stance</u>.

Without a fundamental "No" to privilege, the self-giving "Yes" leads to self (group, institution, nation . . .) exaltation and lordship. But the self-denying "No" opens the door to a "Yes" of servanthood. It was to this that Abraham's descendants were called as "a light to the nations." The prophetic word in the Isaiah servant-songs points clearly to that intention. But this servant is always seen first as servant . . . of the Lord. Without the relationship to the Lord of justice and peace, the servant to the nations would only serve their own self-exaltations, ambitions, and lordships. The oft-quoted "the

world writes the church's agenda" is a faithful reading only when the church--in the steps of Jesus--is the suffering servant of the Lord. With that important condition laid down, servanthood is best understood, it is true, in terms of availability, the second important element of mission strategy.

The servant allows the other to dispose of him; he turns himself over to the one being served. In this he is completely vulnerable. The one being served defines the situation, the condition, the need, the ambitions. He writes the agenda for the servant of the Lord who serves with the Lord's strategy. "I am a free man, nobody's slave; but I make myself everybody's slave in order to win as many as possible." The basin and towel of the servant who washes the other's feet is without doubt a foretaste of the cross and an essential part of its strategy.

Now it is clear that the doctor is not a crippling master, but a true servant when he performs an appendectomy on the patient who pleads with him for a laxative. But even where "doctor knows best" the diagnosis is based on the patient's complaint, a thorough examination of the patient, and a thorough consultation with him. Such a parable helps us to see how the servant of the Lord is clearly oriented and qualified by Him in his service to the nations. But this does not make him ipso facto an expert with all the answers to every situation. In the service of the church to the world, she is expert only in that in which she is the most vulnerable--in her own faith, hope, and love-expression, which she maintains only as she gives them away as servant.

Another parable? The maidservant from Israel who attended Naaman's wife, and the prophet of God, Elisha, give an image of a people who are servants of healing to the leadership of one of the nations, because they are first of all servants of the Lord. The leper provides the agenda, the servants are available . . . in the Lord. The leper refuses the word of the Lord's prophet and dictates his own terms in the light of his own understandings. The servant is still available, but only in the Lord. He has shown his availability, his servanthood, but he has shown that it is not subject to the personal whims of the leprous master. Other servants will persuade the Syrian officer to listen to the prophetic word; his obedience will bring the healing of the Lord through His servants who served him. This is what men saw in Jesus of Nazareth who "took the nature of a servant." The apostle who said of men that he was nobody's slave, will unashamedly call himself the slave of such a one who reoriented his service. This is elementary to all of the people of God.

3. Identification, the risk.

The servant-son of God puts himself in the human situation: "he became like a man." Thus by virtue of this identification with man, the strategy of the people of God is also defined as putting one's self in the other's place. For Jesus it will mean experiencing Zealot ambitions to re-establish the Davidic kingdom, violently struggling with Pharisaic desire for purity that could choke out the human, knowing the Sadducean appeal to compromise and conformity

as his own. This could be a risky thing; but Jesus was the servant of the Lord.

"Sitting where they sit" will always be fundamental to mission strategy if it is a cross-strategy. There is never a guarantee that the risk will not fail! Israel was a part of God's risk when she settled in Canaan and lost out in the midst of these national baals. The well-known artist Vincent Van Gogh took the risk as an evangelist in the mining area of the Belgian Borinage . . . and lost. The worker priests of the Paris Mission took the risk, until the time that the Roman hierarchy intervened and said that the risk was too great. But it is precisely this risk that makes servanthood possible. Identification with the one being served, living faith, temptation, and love in his context and from his perspective is the hallmark of service. The writer to the Hebrews understood the incarnation as one "tempted in all respects as we are yet without sinning." This kind of servanthood is at the heart of God's strategy.

One of the classical heresies with regard to the incarnation was that of docetism which taught that Jesus appeared to be a man, that for all practical purposes he seemed to be a man, but in reality he was not really human. The doctrine presented Christ as one who was only "playing man." In a similar way we must face the fact that much of what we have traditionally called missions has been heretically docetic. The missionary seemed to want to identify, but he didn't really. Often by definition he was structured into the place of privilege from which he came. Factory workers in Paris told the worker-priests that they were just playing being working-men, because at any moment they could decide that they had had enough of a laboring man's life and return to parish church or convent. For a true working man in Paris this was not possible, for he has no other place to go.

This docetic missionary stance--apparently almost inevitable--only points more clearly to the way in which the total body of the people of God is called to mission. In fact in the deepest sense of the word it is the "everyman" of the church that is in true identification--in the shop and factory, in the school and classroom, in the office and business. It is the so-called "special forces" sent into new and strange and other-cultured contexts that are docetic. This is the reason they work as rapidly as possible to create "a new people of God in this place" so that there will be authentic identification. It is the docetic character of this pattern which should more than ever make the missioner suspicious of automatic transfer of his own cultural values to other people. It reduces their identification with their own milieu, and thus reduces the heart of God's strategy--incarnation--to a docetic nonredemptive mission.

"Naaman said to Elisha, 'Henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any God but the Lord. But in this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the House of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the House of Rimmon . . . when I bow myself in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter.' Elisha said to him, 'Go in peace.'"

And what if the risk should fail? It is no worse than that of refusing to take the original risk Christ took in identifying with man. At the same time the docetic threat is always there. The Apostle Paul was aware of this as a mobile and flexible missioner, yet he worked hard at overcoming it. "While working with the Jews I live like the Jews in order to win them; and even though I myself am not subject to the law of Moses, I live as though I were, when working with those who are, in order to win them. In the same way, when with the Gentiles I live like a Gentile outside the Jewish law in order to win Gentiles. This doesn't mean that I don't obey God's law, for I am really under Christ's law. Among the weak I become weak like one of them in order to win them. So I become all things to all men that I may save some of them by any means possible." Was he "playing" Jew, or Gentile, or weak?

He was anxious to see that the bridges of God in cultural identification not be absolutely broken through cultural transfer. "If a circumcised man has accepted God's call, he should not try to remove the marks of circumcision; if an uncircumcised man has accepted God's call, he should not get circumcised. Being circumcised or not means nothing. What matters is to obey God's commandments. Every man should remain as he was when he accepted God's call. This is the rule I teach in all the churches."

We always risk failure, docetic or otherwise, when we seek to identify with others. Yet the people of God take the risk. "The Son of Man came and he ate and drank, and everyone said, Look at this man! He is a glutton and wine-drinker, and is a friend of tax collectors and outcasts. God's wisdom, however, is shown to be true by its results."

4. Humble obedience, the contradiction.

The servant of the Lord is characterized by his obedience to the Lord. The servant in the midst of the nations is characterized by his humility--his submission to the human context of need, his learning from it, and his obedience to that situation. The description of the servant stance has already pointed out in passing what is here underscored--the contradictory situation of one who commits himself to men in their situation. Yet in spite of his identification with them he obeys the Lord in another Spirit, with another Word, with another means, with another strategy. And this latter can most often be interpreted as being the opposite of humility.

In all honesty, however, we must admit that docetic missions have very often--and this is the perennial problem--confused the "will of the human context from where I come" with the will of the Lord. Thus what has been honestly discerned as "obedience to the Lord" by the servant has often been "obedience to my own points of reference." It is often a correct discerning by the peoples of the nations that this is not a humble obedience but a proud imposition of the foreign.

Yet, taking into account this serious distortion, a true obedience to the Lord, the life-giving Spirit, can and will still be interpreted as a proud intrusion

of the foreign. This "foreign" element of Spirit and Word is, however, the real reason for being and his ultimate meaning. This contradiction is built into the very heart of mission; it can be no other way. The docetic missionary, because of the possibility of these facile distortions will therefore do his "sorting-out" with the new people of God and not for them. It may be that his own sense of identity and integrity will require of him that he cannot accept for himself that discernment. Nevertheless, he will not impose his commitment to his own sense of identity on those of the new people of God who have discerned otherwise, even in a learning process. One can be a true servant of the Lord, fully respectful of His other servants in mutual respect and humble obedience.

5. The cross, the consequences.

This built-in contradiction leads to the cross--the consequence of faithful obedience to the Lord. Those who are still moving in the stream of self-fulfilment, rather than the fulfilment of the Lord's purposes, oppose God's servant. Their opposition may take forms of mistrust, rejection, persecution, or liquidation. This is not in any sense to be confused with a false cross of bearing up under necessary deprivation, or what is the lot of suffering humanity (war or famine) or the consequences of a bad character and temperament, or national identity. The cross is the consequence of obedience in identification, particularly when obedience is revealed in the refusal to use self-fulfilment and its offensive and defensive tools as a strategy--either for the servant himself or "profiting" from that stream in others "for the sake of the gospel." The servant announces and works for the salvation of justice and peace--reconciliation in community--that Christ gives, in the way that He did, as a suffering servant. This means that results and effectiveness must always disappear in the dust behind the thrusting toward faithfulness and the cross, experts on church growth notwithstanding.

Final Remarks

A strategy-of-the-cross is fundamentally personal and derives meaning through personal commitment. It explains the personal character of this description. "Israel" is a personal reality; "the servant" is a personal reality; the "body of Christ" or the "new man in Christ" is personal reality, even when they imply collective personalities. The individual who symbolizes or represents such collective reality, even though plagued with the contrast of his personal cross-strategy with that of the rest of the group, can only resolve the conflict by putting that too in the light of the cross. For this the Spirit is given, but that would be another chapter. Even if this should mean failure before men, that too is another chapter, also written by the Lord--called Resurrection.

David A. Shank has served with the Mennonite Board of Missions in Belgium since 1950 in what has come to be termed a "post-Christian" society. In November-December 1970 he was resource person for the first Mission Forum which is now available in booklet form under the title His Spirit First.

Editorial Comment

In our action-oriented western culture the pressure is to get on with the job following our culturally-conditioned instincts to produce results. The great error in all of this is that we can glorify action instead of obedience and confuse results with faithfulness to our Lord. Therefore, the church in western society constantly stands in need of the kind of confrontation which interrupted Saul's journey to Damascus so that our attention can be arrested by a new vision until, suddenly stripped of our self-confidence, we ask, "What shall we do, Lord?"

That new vision will have implications for God's people at numerous points, as suggested in the foregoing article. Perhaps the most difficult to perceive and accept are those instances where we have been acting out of a devotion to religious conviction but have been blinded by our own zeal. Surrounded by the forms and language of piety, it has been easy to overlook the self-centeredness and self-righteousness at the very heart of our attitudes and actions. It is a measure of our lack of preparedness to be doing Christ's work when we have failed to grasp the necessity of discovering and accepting the servant mentality. "Except you be converted . . . ."

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FOR MISSION LEADERS

MISSION-FOCUS

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MOTIVATING FOR MISSION

By J. D. Graber

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11).

Famine and disasters have always aroused our sympathies. We have opened our hearts and our purses to relief to the suffering. Our Mennonite relief efforts have been massive, especially since the end of world war II, and our disaster service is widely and officially recognized.

The question that arises, however, is whether we are as well and as highly recognized as being responsive to that other famine--the famine of the spirit--of which the prophet Amos has spoken. What is it that pulls at our heart strings? What is it that motivates us to sacrificial self-giving? Do we, perchance, respond to physical and human needs earlier and more easily than to the needs of the spirit of man? May this be a measure of our own spiritual immaturity?

Not Polarization But Priority

Jesus looked on the multitudes and had compassion on them, not only because they were physically or socially disadvantaged, but because they were, as He said, "like sheep without a shepherd." After feeding the five thousand He gave a pointed message on the bread of life. As a result the crowds left Him. When He asked the disciples whether they were also going away, Peter expressed mature spiritual insight by answering, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

What we must studiously avoid is to polarize the human versus the spiritual. Let us state categorically at the outset that it is never either/or but always a sound balance of both. Having established that point of view we now dare say that human and physical need appeals first to the spiritually immature, and that a truly compassionate concern for man's spiritual welfare develops only later. Our first overseas mission effort was prompted by a severe famine in India. Children were starving and so there was an outpouring of sympathy and money for food for the hungry. There were many in those days who were wholeheartedly in favor of physical famine relief but who had not yet matured to a real interest in missions. This polarization of interest is still with us, perhaps even in the Mennonite Church, but more commonly among people in general. About everyone agrees that relief and social services among needy and disadvantaged people are desirable, but not "interfering with their religion," as they like to express it. At the other extreme are those who are dedicated to "saving souls" without concern for the whole man.

Arrogance or Conviction

Is it arrogance to believe that Jesus is the true and final revelation of God, and that men must open their hearts and minds to the claims of Jesus in order to be saved? The arrogance lies, perhaps, not so much in the conviction one holds about Christ and the gospel as the attitude with which one holds this conviction and the manner in which one propagates it. The cure for arrogance is not the watering down of convictions, but in an increase of the love and humility with which we hold them. Unless we accept the finality of Jesus and His gospel with firm conviction there can be no serious motivation to mission. This does not mean that we should be emphasizing the negative aspects of the gospel. Paul, apparently, did not stress the fact that "You are hell-bound unless you repent and believe in Jesus." He was convinced in his heart that Jesus was truly the son of God, who died on the cross for our sins, that He rose from the dead and is thus our living contemporary, and that He is coming again. These were for him facts of his faith and he simply proclaimed them with zeal and earnestness. But always he avoided what to our day is a persistent heresy: that men are saved by the beliefs they hold <u>about</u> Christ and the gospel rather than by what that belief does in their daily lives. After every doctrinal discussion in his letters to the churches Paul follows with the practical section spelling out what that faith does in terms of everyday living.

We have a problem in trying to hold a firm conviction about the finality and the uniqueness of Christ and the imperative to propagate it, without then feeling the stigma of arrogance and obscurantism. Is it intellectually respectable to hold these missionary convictions? I believe the question of convictions is one of spiritual maturity. If our faith is a reality and if we have achieved a satisfying Christian experience, we can not really have doubts about the finality of the eternal truth of God in Christ Jesus and the concomitant imperative to proclaim it. If we are motivated by love of Christ and love for all men, we can bear clear testimony to our faith without a feeling of superiority or arrogance. This is mission in the spirit of the gospel.

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Humanitarianism Not Enough

The New Testament theology of mission is based on the conviction that humanitarianism is not enough. We must recognize that even if we could succeed in giving a people a better diet, more adequate medical service, better schools, improved housing, an ideal public health program and a solution to the most severe of their social problems, their fundamental need would still be unmet. I hasten to comment again that these services are necessary and good. I only emphasize that they are not in themselves mission. Unless men are made to see Jesus as the living saviour who can heal their spiritual disease they have not been challenged by the gospel.

Loving service in the spirit of Jesus is indeed a revelation of Jesus. But the service by itself is an incomplete revelation. The deed usually needs the word to explain the meaning and purpose of the deed, even as the word needs the deed to demonstrate, clarify and complete its meaning. A missionary stopped at a photo shop in Calcutta to pick up some slides. The Hindu shop owner suggested they project the slides and have a look. When they came to the picture of a missionary nurse dressing a loathsome leprosy ulcer the Hindu shopkeeper said, "This is the slide I wanted to show you. I want to know why she is doing that." The Hindu philosophy and theology of the meaning of service is quite different from the Christian view. A beggar on the street does you a favor when he permits you to earn merit by giving him alms.

No question was more common in my high school Bible class in India than the meaning of works of charity. Certainly, the Hindu students would argue, if a rich man gave a hundred thousand rupees for feeding the poor God would have to reward him. So according to this doctrinal frame of reference when the Christian missionary or relief worker feeds the hungry and clothes the naked he is simply paying insurance premiums, as it were, for his own future felicity. Agape love, the love of Christ in the heart of the disciple--the love that is not earning salvation, but purely and simply trying to make clear the self-giving love of Christ--is a new and unique reality that needs explanation. If we assume that our service is understood in its Christian context without elucidation, we are expecting the impossible.

In the keynote sermon on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Mennonite Central Committee, the speaker asked whether it is not a piece of insufferable arrogance to say that our service to the needy, and the Christ-like spirit in which we do it, is so perfectly in the spirit and character of Jesus that the people we serve will see Jesus and apprehend His saving grace without our needing to speak the word? Indeed, unless we explain the meaning of our physical snd social services they can easily be misunderstood. And if we say we will not speak about Jesus the Saviour or share His Word until we have served the human needs, the danger of misunderstanding our motives is very real. If Jesus means as much to us as we say He does, and if faith in Him is as critically important as we profess, then why have we been so long in saying so?

Agape love is not always self-evident. In fact, non-Christian philosophers and psychologists say there is no such a thing as unselfish love. In the final analysis all love is essentially selfish. Nothing short of an understanding of Christ's self-giving on Calvary, and His selfless service to needy people can make this clear. But when we are motivated by the agape love of Christ, serve in the same spirit, and make this clear by word and witness, there is then a possibility that they will be able to understand what we mean when we speak of the infinite love and never-failing grace of Christ.

Truly Christian Motivation

What then is the true Christian motivation to mission? Is it human need or is it Christ's love? Or, can these two even be properly polarized? The ideal for the Christian is to love men as Christ loved and loves them. So if we are grasped by the love of Christ it leads us on until we learn to love men as Jesus did. However, if we begin at the human end, if human need is the motivation, there is always the possibility that our mission programs will become merely humanitarian or secular. Not that these motivations are wrong; it is only that they are not enough. And they do not merit being called mission by biblical standards unless they are over-arched and motivated by a profound desire to make Christ known. Our motivation should reach the maturity of that of the Apostle Paul when he said, "necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" and, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Corinthians 9:16-23). Paul indeed collected money for relief of the brethren in Jerusalem, but this clearly did not hold first priority in his mission. It was an incidental, however significant, by-product.

Christian Duty vs. Christian Mission

A question that needs to be answered is: What about the constant example of Jesus meeting human need, and the total emphasis of the New Testament that if we love Christ we will love and serve the needy and dispossessed? There can certainly be no question that as disciples of Jesus we will become deeply involved in easing the injustices, discriminations and severe human needs of our fellow men. The question persists, however, whether a ministry to human physical need is in itself mission; or, is it only a fundamental Christian duty? Is not the mission of the Church in the world primarily, i.e. first in time, to proclaim "the acceptable year of the Lord?" This dichotomy between Christian duty and missionary outreach of the church in the world may seem baffling. But I am convinced that making the two synonymous confuses the issue and leads to the danger of reducing the Gospel to a mere humanitarianism. Human and physical service is not mission, and we are in danger of seeking an easy way out of our missionary obligation when we so designate it. Again the dictum of Jesus applies: "These you ought to have done, without neglecting the other" (Matthew 23:23b).

For the Glory of God

Finally, I would like to affirm that a desire to glorify God is at the heart of missionary motivation. In John 17:4 Jesus seems to have summed up His whole life by saying, "I glorified thee on the earth." Only then does He say 1) He has "accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do," and 2) He has "manifested thy name," and 3) "I have given them the words which thou gavest me." We see here the usual components of a missionary's task: serving, teaching, and disseminating the Word. It is significant that the over-arching purpose is not to get this or that done but to glorify the Father. This is indeed a dominant theme of the whole scriptures. It was the obsession of the Psalmist in numerous songs. In Psalms 96, for example, he says, "Sing to the Lord, all the earth . . . Declare His glory among the nations . . . For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." In Psalms 67 the same theme is developed. God is to be praised and the people of the whole earth are to know His way. There is the well known statement from Isaiah 40:5 where the prophet says, "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." In Isaiah 60:1 he challenges the people to "Arise, shine . . . and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." In Isaiah 66:19 he prophesies, "they shall declare my glory among the nations."

Our missionary motivation needs to rise to this high level, i.e. it needs to become more mature. It is still too often human need, whether physical or spiritual, that holds the center of our missionary dynamic. But if it is human need that motivates us then our missionary activity becomes secularized and humanized. But if, growing out of our loving and living relationship with Him, we seek to glorify His name, human service as well as the witness of the Word, find their strongest motivation and their clearest meaning.

It is after all His work and not ours. He is building His Church, not we; and as Lord of history, He is building His Kingdom and bringing it to its final consummation at the end of history. We are building with Him for eternity. Ours is no task of a few years or of a lifetime. With Him we look with anticipation toward the grand consummation at the end of time when His Kingdom will be established in full glory and power.

J. D. Graber served as a missionary in India 1925-42, a relief commissioner in China 1943-44, and as general secretary and secretary for overseas missions of the Mennonite Board of Missions 1944-67. For six months in 1967-68 he assisted in the famine relief program in Bihar, India. In 1959 Graber delivered the Conrad Grebel Lectures which were subsequently published as The Church Apostolic.

Editorial Comment

For some it may seem that the issue of missionary motivation has been so thoroughly discussed that any further treatment runs the risk of redundancy. It is indeed true that many sermons promoting the missionary calling of the church have been devoted to this theme. It could not be otherwise. Response to the mission of Christ hinges on the basis of appeal. This is of the very essence of mission.

It is well, however, that we be reminded from missionary history that missionary motives have not been at all constant or consistent. In fact, at any given time in history we can discover that there has been a complex of motives unique to that period. Two recent surveys by eminent interpreters of missionary history trace out the variety and vicissitudes of missionary motives in American and British church history.

In one chapter of The Missionary Movement from Britain in Modern History (SCM Press, 1965), Canon Max Warren analyzes "Missionary Motives, 1789-1859." Warren isolates five motives which have been influential: 1) the appeal for reparations for having engaged in slave trading; 2) the religious co-efficient of political trusteeship; 3) gratitude for the gospel; 4) gloria Dei; and 5) obedience to the Great Commission.

In contrast, Paul S. Minear has focused on the great theme of gratitude which pervades the writings of the Apostle Paul, especially in Romans. The Apostle never lost contact with what was basic. His ministry found its center in Christ.

> Obligation to him who died produces obligation to those for whom he died. This very 'law' applies with special force to the particularity of Paul's call as an apostle. God's intention in bringing Paul to faith in Christ has been to send him as a 'minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles' (Romans 15:16). To the extent that Paul was indebted to God for this call, to that very extent he was indebted to those Gentiles for whose sake God had called him. And the same logic applies to every person who is called to any form of diakonia. He is placed under a vast obligation to those whom God intends, through that diakonia, to draw within the realm of grace. Thus faith in Christ inevitably creates a mutuality of indebtedness. It impels the faithful, in love for others, to seek to elicit and to strengthen faith in them. Only faith of this quality is apostolic. Such faith recognizes that the believer is as deeply indebted to unbelievers as to Christ, as deeply indebted to the foolish as to the wise. Here is a debt of whose genuineness there can be no doubt. Yet this debt depends not in the least upon the tangible

> contributions of the creditors to the debtors, but wholly upon the gift of God in Christ. The character of this debt is indicated by the method of payment: constant, intercessory prayer (1:9), the mutual encouragement of each other's faith (1:12), the reaping of 'some harvest' (1:13), the preaching of the gospel (1:15). If one is indebted to men because of Christ's grace, then one honors the debt in ways such as these. ("Gratitude and Mission in the Epistle to the Romans," Basileia, Hermelink and Margull, editors, Evang. Missionsverlag GMBH, 1959, p.44.)

R. Pierce Beaver's survey covers 300 years of missionary activity in America--with the period up to 1800 being exclusively involved with missions to the American Indians ("Missionary Motivation through Three Centuries," in Reinterpretation in American Church History, Jerald C. Brauer, editor, U. of Chicago Press, 1968). Among the 14 themes Beaver identifies are: the missionary clause in colony charters, advantages of missions over the military in bringing Indians under control, opposition to Roman Catholic missions, Calvinist doctrine of the missionary obligation of Christian magistrates, glory of God, compassion for perishing souls, man as God's co-worker, humanitarian pity for the less fortunate, love of God and Christ, obedience to Great Commission, eschatology/apocalyptic, nationalism and worldwide vision for evangelization ("The evangelization of the world in this generation"). Beaver shows clearly the decisive impact the social-political milieu has had on missionary motives in each period.

What emerges is a picture of missionary motivation which is a mixture of both proper and improper motives. Beaver concludes by noting: "The thread of love--love of God, of Christ, of fellow men--runs throughout the whole story. But what had begun by giving glory to God, three hundred years later has become doing one's duty to Christ." Each generation must return to the Word to rediscover what normative missionary motives are in order that the distortions of ethnocentrism and secularization can be dealt with.

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FOR MISSION LEADERS

MISSION-FOCUS

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REDISCOVERING THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

By Virgil Vogt

We are living in the most exciting era in the world mission of the Christian church. During the past 250 years, the emphasis on "foreign missions" has been so successful that Christian churches have now been established in almost every nation on earth.

We are now entering a time when the evangelization of the nations will be carried primarily by local churches and local leadership. We can expect to see dramatic growth on the part of these younger churches. What has happened in Indonesia and among Pentecostals in South America are examples which I expect to see repeated in many parts of the world.

For churches in North America, the success of "foreign missions" requires a shift in our thinking about missions:

1. We need to discover a more adequate style of spontaneous growth for churches which are indigenous to North America in this latter third of the 20th century. Because North America plays such a central role in world politics and world economics, the reformulation of Christian mission within this continent is a strategic contribution which we can make to the whole world. This is a fundamental part of our world mission responsibility at this particular stage in history. The advanced nature of our highly organized society will require churches of great spiritual power and organizational creativity. They must be stronger in shaping the lives of their members than the combined influence of the university, the White House, the news media, General Motors and the Pentagon. No small task! But there are already a number of very promising examples.

2. The church worldwide still needs missionaries in great numbers. The spontaneous growth of local churches does not eliminate this need. In fact, there is a great need for missionaries in the United States and Canada, not to mention all those nations in which the Christian church is an even smaller minority.

However, we have come to a point in world missions when a more careful and profound understanding of the missionary task will be necessary. The definition of "missionary" which was good enough 50 years ago is inadequate in most situations today. Hence, those groups that have not sharpened their understanding of the missionary role are finding that missionaries seem almost obsolete in the current world scene. All kinds of specialized workers are now being sent out, often with little awareness of the fact that being a "missionary" is a very unique specialization, with specific requirements that are at least as exacting as those of other professions.

Clarifying the Missionary Role

The primary purpose of this paper is to suggest the lines along which we might clarify the missionary role. My basic proposal is that we begin to equate "missionary" with "apostle" as we study our New Testament. The two terms are synonymous. I believe that our concept of "missionary" would be helped a great deal by closer identification with the role played by the apostles in the New Testament church.

The term "apostle" is used in the New Testament to describe certain persons who carried a particular ministry within the larger Christian movement. We find this term listed by Paul as one of various spiritual gifts which God has given to his church (Ephesians 4, I Corinthians 12). While the original Twelve Apostles had a unique role in history, never to be shared by others, most Biblical scholars would agree that the term "apostle" has a broader application. There were other "apostles" besides the twelve. There is an "apostolic" gift, which along with the gifts of teaching, prophecy, evangelism and all the others, is given to the church in every generation. Let me share a few ideas about what this apostolic gift is, and how such persons function in the expansion of the church.

1. Men like Peter and Paul were apostles in the New Testament church. They were the most gifted and most experienced leaders in the whole movement. Men of this type were the ones sent out by the church to the frontiers on missions--the apostolic ministry. This is in striking contrast to much current practice. We tend to send the young and inexperienced to do missions. It's easier. They are more mobile. When we do this, however, it shows that we have grossly underestimated the nature of the task.

2. The root of the term "apostle" means "to send out." These are persons who have been sent out by the church. Apostles do their work away from home. Theirs is by definition a traveling ministry. Again, we can see the contrast with much current policy. Today's missionaries are sent out, but then they often settle down in their new environment. Peter and Paul never did. Their home base remained in Jerusalem and Antioch. At other places they were always transient. Their apostolic ministry was an itinerant ministry. Sometimes they stayed as long as two or three years; most often it was a matter of

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weeks or months. This transient quality is important, for this is one of the distinctions between the apostolic ministry and the pastoral ministry. What we have frequently done is to send pastors from one country to another and called them missionaries. But a church that is built around a foreign pastor always has great difficulty learning how to function with indigenous leadership.

3. The unique gift which the apostle exercises is in laying the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:19-20: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." The Apostle Paul's personal testimony is given in I Corinthians 3:10: "According to the commission of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it.") An apostle is someone who is empowered by the Lord to lay this foundation. For this reason the apostle does this with particular effectiveness. The apostolic gift of establishing the church is different from that of an evangelist. The evangelist is gifted in leading persons to faith in Christ. But an evangelist is not gifted in gathering a group of believers and forming them together in such a way that they constitute the foundation for a new church.

   This apostolic gift is also different from the gift of pastor (or elder/overseer). Pastors are gifted in gathering believers together into an experience of church, but they themselves are an essential ongoing part of that church. This is why a pastor who has gathered a church around himself in some foreign country--just as in the homeland--has so much difficulty leaving it to other leadership. But the apostle has the gift of gathering individual believers and creating a church fellowship which can function in his absence. He shows them how to become a body which can go on without him being there to guide it. This is a unique and highly specialized task. It always includes the identification and empowering of local leadership (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

4. In order to perform such a unique function, an apostle has always been given the possibility of exercising a variety of spiritual gifts. In fact, during the early stages of laying the foundation, the apostle and his helpers must exercise all of the more important gifts. Special mention should be made, however, of the gift of faith which is necessary for an apostolic ministry. An apostle is one who has learned to trust God for a great many situations. He has learned to have complete faith in God for all the economic needs of the ministry. This is made especially clear in Matthew 10, a set of instructions given by Jesus to his first apostles, but obviously preserved in their present form because of their relevance to later apostles. The apostle is one who has faith to perform "signs, wonders and mighty works," as a testimony to the message he proclaims (II Corinthians 12:12). Most important of all, the apostle is one who has faith for the creation of a new people and the empowering of new leadership where these realities have not existed before.

5. The apostles who are instrumental in founding new churches also have an important role in the care and training of such churches. There is abundant evidence of this in the New Testament. In this role, however, the apostles take their place alongside a host of other workers (I Corinthians 1-3), all of whom are building upon the foundation which has been laid. The apostle does not hold any exclusive right or power over the church which he has helped to establish. In fact, it is clear that the apostolic authority, which was total authority over the new church in its founding, definitely diminishes as the local church grows in the exercise of its own authority.

6. Paul, in his apostolic ministry, directed a team of other persons who functioned in various supportive roles. Timothy and Titus were not apostles. They were Paul's helpers. Paul enlisted and directed a large number of individual workers. Even though none of them, on their own, could have done the work of an apostle, by working with Paul they were able to enhance and enlarge his apostolic ministry. The same holds true today. Persons with other gifts, such as teaching or evangelism, may be very ineffectual in establishing new churches if sent out on their own. But if they work under the direction of someone with an apostolic gift, their labors can play a strategic part in founding new churches.

Policy Implications

Let me try to summarize some of the implications which this understanding of the missionary task would have for current church policies and programs:

1. Being a missionary is a highly specialized task which can only be carried out by those particular persons whom God empowers for this ministry of establishing new churches. The church should be sensitive to confirm and support those who have been called by God to perform this ministry. Because of the nature of this task, we should expect that the most experienced and gifted leaders of the church will be the ones called upon to fulfill this itinerant missionary role. In my observation, the emergence of full-fledged apostolic ministries is most frequently found in those sections of the church which are involved in the charismatic renewal.

2. We should be more careful and more modest about the kinds of assignments that we give persons who are going overseas. We should not send pastors and evangelists to do the work of an apostle. We should not send young and inexperienced workers to exercise spiritual gifts which they have never been given opportunity to employ in their home churches. Sending young, dedicated Christians to overseas assignments is a fine thing. This should be continued, even increased. But when they go overseas such persons should have a job description which does not overestimate their spiritual capacities.

3. Missionaries who have the gift of establishing new churches in a relatively short period of time are continually and urgently needed in all parts of the world. This concept and this need should be kept in the awareness of the church.

4. With indigenous churches now existing in almost every nation, there is a great need for sharing personnel and money between churches in various parts of the world. This exchange of resources should not, however, be equated with apostolic ministry, except where an apostolic ministry is really involved. The church-to-church sharing of resources should continue and grow. So should the sending out of apostles. Both the sharing and the sending of apostles is hindered when we don't understand the difference between the two.

5. It would seem that mission organizations could be most useful in this new era of world mission by focusing more specifically on the support of apostolic ministries. At the very least, they might begin to distinguish more clearly in their assignment of personnel and money, between church-to-church sharing and the apostolic ministry.

(For more detailed discussion of the apostolic ministry see Watchman Nee, The Normal Christian Church Life, International Students Press, 1969.)

For a number of years Virgil Vogt has been associated with Reba Place Fellowship, Evanston, Illinois. Earlier he pastored a Mennonite congregation. In 1961 he wrote The Christian Calling (Herald Press) which challenged Christians to follow a more biblical vision in their vocational commitments.

Editorial Comment

The intention of the foregoing article is to provoke new thought about the way the mission of Jesus Christ is being prosecuted by his church in the world today. What is fresh in the presentation is not Vogt's call for a new strategy or his observation that the contemporary way of defining mission so as to include everyone tends to blunt and confuse. There has been a strongly felt need for fresh strategies for two generations and respected missionary statesmen have been persistently warning for two decades against the inevitable dilution of missionary thrust if every Christian is designated a missionary. Both of these points are important in the total argument but are not the central issue.

At a more fundamental level Vogt is questioning the very structures of church life and action. The illustration of the problem happens to be the way the church has been carrying out missions. However, the same concern could have been illustrated from other phases of church life just as well.

In recent years there has been a trickle of scholarship which has dealt with this issue. In his lectures entitled The Household of God, Bishop Lesslie

Newbigin characterized the Christian church as being dominated by two patterns. The Catholic tradition emphasized the givenness of the structures of the church (guarded through apostolic succession) while the Protestants laid hold of the givenness of the message (stressing proper preaching of the Word and observance of the sacraments). Newbigin suggested there was in fact a third view which he termed the "Pentecostal." In this stream the overriding conviction is that the Christian life consists in experiencing the power and message of the Holy Spirit. Safe doctrine and proper order are hollow shells if the dynamic of the Spirit is absent. Where is the church? "Where the Holy Spirit is recognizably present in power."

In an essay in 1949 Professor Ernst Käsemann took up the theme of "Ministry and Community in the New Testament." His point of departure was the importance of the concept of charisma in the Pauline writings and the absence of any formal definition of ecclesiastical office. Building in part on the exegetical foundation laid by Käsemann, Professor Hans Küng subsequently called for a return to "The Charismatic Structure of the Church." In so doing he cut across the traditional views of ministry and advocated the views of the Apostle Paul that the structuring of church life is to be based on the endowment of spiritual gifts to every member. The age-old fear of fanaticism had led the church to reject movements that tended toward the spontaneous and enthusiastic in favor of clear patterns of ecclesiastical authority and structure. But in so doing a good deal more than emotional excesses was controlled. A particular view of what the New Testament said about ministry and structure was imposed on scripture that was only occasionally challenged by renewal movements which can be generally grouped as the Believers' Church stream.

Canon Dillistone once remarked that the church has tended to pursue one of several patterns: exaggerated asceticism, mechanical sacramentalism, or inflexible clericalism. Then he added, "At the same time they are ever in danger of limiting the Spirit's energies within the channels of a particular emotional experience or of a stereotyped pattern of behaviour or of a specific intellectual formulation." The consequence is that the "fulness of Christ" is being forfeited by the church and the mission of Christ is being thwarted.

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